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JOHN OWEN'S JOURNAL

OF HIS

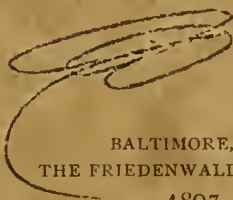
REMOVAL FROM VIRGINIA TO ALABAMA

IN 1818

EDITED BY

THOMAS MCADORY OWEN

[From Publications of the Southern History Association, April, 1897]



BALTIMORE, MD.
THE FRIEDENWALD COMPANY

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JOHN OWEN'S JOURNAL OF HIS REMOVAL FROM VIRGINIA TO ALABAMA IN 1818.

The student of the Western migrations will find in this brief journal much of interest. In its brief form and rough jottings of daily events, consisting of hardships and vexations, a more graphic picture is presented than could be realized from mere description.

John Owen, born in Person County, N. C., Feb. 12, 1786, was one of seven children of Richardson Owen (b. in Henrico Co., Va.; d. at Tuscaloosa, Ala.) and his wife Sarah Duty, (b. in Warren Co., N. C.; d. at Tuscaloosa, Ala.) He received an "old field school" education. On March 1, 1805, at a session of the Va. Conference, M. E. Church, at Edmund Taylor's, Caswell Circuit, North Carolina, he was admitted on trial in the traveling connection. In 1807 he was ordained deacon, and in 1809, an elder. In Feb., 1812, he located, and never again entered into active connection with the Conference.

On Sept. 9, 1813, in Norfolk, or Princess Anne County, Va., he married Ann Keeling Silvester, b. March 10, 1797, the dau. of David Silvester, (b. April 25, 1767; d. March 20, 1797,) and his wife Frances Bartee (b. Feb. 20, 1774; m. Sept. 23, 1790; d. Jan. 15, 1833.) Frances (*Bartee*) Silvester, referred to as *Mother* in this Journal, on the death of her husband became, Aug. 25, 1801, the wife of Joseph Nimmo (d. Jan. 22, 1816.) At the date of this journey, she was the second time a widow. She was the dau. of Thomas Bartee (b. Feb. 19, 1739, son of Robert and Elizabeth [—] Bartee) and his wife Anna Keeling (b. May 23, 1741; m. Oct. 4, 1767, dau. of William and Amy [—] Keeling.) The Keelings, Nimmos, Bartees and Silvesters were all early and prominent settlers in Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties.

At the time of the breaking up of his home, for this journey to the far West, John Owen lived near the Great Bridge, in Norfolk Co., Va. Those accompanying him were his wife, two small children,

his mother-in-law, and three or four slaves. On reaching Tuscaloosa, Ala., he acquired lands and added to his slave property. He became a practicing physician, and rose in importance locally. He was at different times a State Bank Agent, State Bank Director, and Mayor of Tuscaloosa. He was ever a devoted Methodist, being a liberal contributor, and preaching when occasion demanded. He was a useful and honored citizen. He d. Feb. 7, 1848, and his wife d. June 30, 1861, and both are buried at Tuscaloosa.

They had five children: I. Sarah Frances Owen, b. Jan. 27, 1815; m. Thomas J. Burke, (both dead)—issue: 1. Edmund Burke, d. unm.; 2. Malcolm Clayton Burke, m. Annie Ida Inge (dead), issue: i. Mary Kate Burke, ii. Robert, iii. Edward, iv. William, v. Malcolm—all at Montgomery, Ala.; 3. Mary Kate Burke (dead), m. Hon. Richard H. Clarke, M. C. 1st Ala. Cong. Dist.—issue: i. William E., d. young; ii. Mabel Radford Clarke, unm.; iii. Kathleen Clarke (dead), m. J. Manly Foster, Tuscaloosa, Ala., issue: (1) Richard Clarke Foster; iv. Mary Clifton, d. young. II. Joseph Richardson Nimmo Owen, b. Feb. 28, 1818, unm., a practicing physician at Eureka, Nev. III. Anne Keeling Owen, d. young. IV. Robert Silvester Owen, unm., resides at East Lake, Ala. V. Virginia Owen, m. Rev. Thomas F. Greene; they reside at Montgomery—issue: 1. Annie Findley Greene, m. Eugene LeVert Brown, they reside at Atlanta, Ga.—issue: i. Eugene; ii. Mary; 2. John Owen Greene, d. young; 3. Kate Silvester Greene, d. young; 4. Robert Harvey Greene; 5. Mary Virginia Greene; 6. Frances Nimmo Greene—numbers 4, 5 and 6 reside at Montgomery, Ala.

Two large folio journals kept by John Owen, 1813-1848, from one of which the extract below is taken, are in the possession of his descendants.

JOURNAL.

Oct. 20 [1818]. Sale of all my goods.

24. Started to the West about 12 oclock & got within 1 mile of Deep creek¹ where we encamp^d.

25. Mov^d forward at half past 8 am At 10 Cart broke down & stop^d to fix it All well good weather and in high spirits Am sick at night & camp^d in church yard

26. Good weather bought cart wheals—repar^d & started forward At night Camp^d 1 mile above Suffolk— Suffolk 34 [miles]— B Water B 22 [miles]

¹ A branch of the Elizabeth river, into which the north end of the Dismal Swamp Canal empties.

27. Mr Stewart left us At 9 mov^d forward All poorly at one stop^d to feed.

28. Mov^d forward at 9 am bad sailing encamped nigh Black Water Bridge¹ where I set up all night apprehensive of Robbers.

29.² Start at half past 7 & travel^d slow & encamp^d at the piny old field

29. Mov^d foward at 7 and camp^d that night at Capt Bisils at 12 this day the Bolt of the fore Bolster broke loose and detained us. We could this day get no corn or fodder till night so that our horses fasted all tolerably well.

30. Started at nine & got one mile above Petersburg.³

31. Started at 9 & got 20 miles on our way to Lynch Burg the roads bad & all well Except Mother Camp^d in a piny old field The wind to the South & warn.

Nov. 1. Started at ½ past 8. Roads hilly no accident but old mair fell down and broke chair bo[a]rd at camp^d at a oke Thicket all well but self unwell with Rheumatism wind to South & warm.

2. Started 20 Minutes Before 9 Roads tolerable got to Prince Edward [County] & encamp^d nigh Millers Tavern at a good place all well wind to South & warm

3. Pas^d Prince Edward CH & at Night camp^d at Buffalo R ' 2 miles above Hamden Sidney College where J. Nimmo came & tarried all night with us

4. Staid to wash at 12 at Morgans Branch

5. Started at 9 Mother sick bad Roads Cart turned over no damage of consequence only shaff Broke—Low spirited in consequence of Mothers indisposition camp^d nigh Thompsons on the Buckingham Road

¹ Over Black Water river, a considerable stream, dividing the counties of Surry and Isle of Wight on the north from Southampton and Sussex on the south.

² Erased in the original, leaving one day unnumbered.

³ There were two roads from Suffolk to Petersburg, the more direct one lying along the James. The other, taken in this case, was much longer, and after passing Black Water extended north-westerly up the Nottoway.

⁴ In Prince Edward County.

Frid. 6. Rain the fore part of the day got into the stage Road Camp^d nigh Long mountain nigh Lynchburg. Weather clear^d up cool All well But Mother & she on the mend Good Roads to day.

Sat. 7. Mov^d forward at 9 bad roads weather Cloudy windy & cold got nigh New London¹ where we had a tolerable encampment. All well.

8. Mov^d forward at 7 Very cold good roads tho hilly encamp^d nigh Liberty All well tho in the dumps.

9. Pas^d through Liberty² & reach^d within 3 miles of Beaufords Gap roads hilly and Rocky incamp^d on a hill side All well

10. Cros^d the Ridge at Beaufords Gap the road bad tho not worse than we expected Got to the limestone watter which is disagreeable to the taste makes bad Coffee & opperates on the bowels—rain commenc^d at 3 PM and continued the night All tolerably well bought a horse at \$90.00 that does not work well encamp^d in the mountains on the Western side of the foot of the Ridge

11. Continued there the old Mair strayd off Nelly strayd off also The Devil turnd loose in good earnest—all well but Lucy & Sam who have the limestone fever—the old Mair & Nelly came in toward night

12 Pas^d through Salem³ good weather & roads All well Camped nigh a mill pond on Roanoke in the Alegany Mountains

13 Cros^d the Alegany Mountain roads bad rocky & hilly Cros^d Roanoke creek 7 times pas^d through the turn pike & camp^d nigh Christians Burg the Capital of Montgomery County All well & in tolerable spirits

14. Pas^d Montgomery Court house, a contentible looking place. Cart tire came loose got a man to mend it who half done it & charg^d double price. Have thought no one too big a fool for a Black Smith but find my mistake.

¹ In Campbell County, Va.

² County seat of Bedford Co., Va., now called Bedford City.

³ Then in Botetourt, but now county seat of Roanoke County, Va.

Crost New River roads bad no fodder to be had nor Eggs Mother poorly rest well but Powel & Winny camp^d nigh New river Weather warm & like for rain

15. Mov^d forward & fell in with negro traders met several droves of hogs intolerable roads the people very poor can get nothing to eat incamp^d within 14 Miles of Wythe All well

16. Started Early pas^d the most infernal Roads that we ever saw can get nothing for ourselves or horses but can buy Whisky & fat Meat the people poor Begarly & mean poor days march Camp^d nigh Wyth C H All well but self sick with Rheumatism

17. Started Early roads something better Cart turned over no damage done no chance of geting anything to Eat All well incamp^d in an enclosed place on a damp spot.

18. Started late clouded up in night & Rained & Snow^d till 10 am cleared off cold & windy Roads worst we have had yet hilly stony and Muddy got fresh meat for the first time camp^d on a handsome spot All well but self

19. Bad roads worst I ever saw cold weather Camp^d 12 m^s from Abington All well

20. Started Early about 10 AM wagon came uncoupled & one of the hames & tongue broke Repar^d them in 3 hours & got within one Mile of Abington Weather cold roads a little better Mother very unwell Lucy unwell very low spirited & envy the Bruit creation their freedom from care & anxiety of mind.

21. Mov^d tolerably early and made a short stop in Abington to lay in stores got meat meal & several other articles. No coffee in town nor Bread A sorry looking place & a poor set got 12 or 15 miles above roads muddy and full of holes Camp^d in a new ground All well except Mother & she better.

22. Started early bad roads Old mair fell down carriage run back very much alarm^d Mother & Ann Coupling Bolt broke detain^d much distress^d & low spirited almost wish I was dead or that fate had bloted the day in which I

was born out of the calendar & left a perfect Blank; mended Bolt Roads continue bad. Crost the Tennessee line¹ people poor & Rough. Swap^d the sorel mair the new one don't work well—camp^d on a hill All well But Mother & self—

23. Have gone back alarm^d Mother & Ann horse Run-away with cart broke it all to peaces & alarm us all very much My mind in a state of distraction on her account and Anns—my wife more fortitude than myself ashamed of it Mr Ray very cleaver & kind left the old wheals & body and mov^d foward roads Bad Camp^d nigh Boat landing.

24. Started late pas^d the boat yard² & crosd the N. fork of Holston where axele tree gave way in the river & scarcely got to shore made a new one which detain^d us 3 hours poor days march camp^d on a high hill nigh the Mill No cleaver people all shifting and mean weather continues good roads hilly & Rocky All well except self & Mother, in some better spirits

25. Roads Bad met with no disaster which is a wonder pas^d through Rogersville³ & Camp^d one mile below the people in better Circumstances. All well as common But Nelly & Delila Camp^d at a Brick yard

26. Started Early Bad roads little better in the Evening Camp^d nigh Beans Station⁴ at one Johnstons who is a hermit in principle & practice Came on to rain in the night tent fell down all got wet

27. Rainy morning all in better spirits than I expected started late roads muddy pas^d through Rutlage Bought all

¹ It had taken thirty days to make the trip through Va. What special reasons determined the selection of this longer and more circuitous route, rather than that through the Carolinas, do not appear. Doubtless, however, it was because of his familiarity with this road, and because travel on an old and established highway was less liable to accidents, and needful supplies could be more easily secured.

² In Sullivan County, Tenn., in the forks of the Holston.

³ County seat of Hawkins County, Tenn.

⁴ In Granger County, Tenn.

⁵ County seat of Granger.

their Bacon & porke which was very little Camp^d nigh Rutlage in a vally All little better—weather clear^d

28. Started late fell in with many families Roads Bad camp^d 12 miles below Knoxville rain^d hard in night all wet Pestered with travelers & negro drivers

29. Started late rainy & disagreeable roads intolerable pas^d through Knoxville a poor Contemptible looking place No meat to be had in it camp^d nigh on the Hill lost dog all well as could be expected

30. Started late got the dog got no meat in Knoxville Roads little Better met Bro H¹ All well except mother

Decem 1. Started late Roads Bad Mother very unwell No milk Butter Chickens or Eggs to be had—camp^d 8 Mls from Kingston All low spirited

2. Started late Roads Bad pas^d through Kingston & cros^d Clinch R drove late camp^d nigh the fork of the Road in a Bad place

3. Roads continue Bad. Bro H left us Took the Sequatchee Road Camp^d nigh a Branch people poor no greens milk chickens or Eggs Mother better Tony sick self Better

4. Started late roads better provisions scarce Camp^d nigh Walter Beanses—came on to rain in the night & rain^d all night—

5. Rainy in the morning & snow^d all the fore noon Started late and got only 4½ miles rented a room of M^r Dickens a free Black man, the night windy & Blustering in the Extreme All unwell & low spirited

6. Started late roads Bad Mother little Better Clouded up toward night like for snow but clear^d off, camp^d at M^r Bensons

7. Started late roads Bad entered the Cherokee Nation² felt Bad wife more fortitude than my self. Bought meat of M^r Paterson

¹ Hopson Owen.

² The route through the Cherokee Nation left the main, or Sequatchee road, at or near Washington, Rhea Co., Tenn.

8. Started late from Patersons and mov^d on through the wilderness roads Bad Banks of Creeks steep & rocky Some good land Got nigh James Browns Mother sick all low spirited

9. Roads Bad got to Browns ferry & cros^d But stal^d on the other Bank which is very Bad

10. Got up the Bank of Tennessee Nelly run away detained us till 1 oclock P M Started & got 4 or 5 Mls over Bad roads Camp^d nigh Choats on the Georgia road All in tolerable health except Mother & she Better

11. Started late rainy all day roads very bad stal^d several times wagon tongue Broke mended it Camp^d on an eminence in the Cherokee Nation All in common health

12. Fine fair weather roads Bad wagon turned over no harm done Mother sick Camp^d at an old camping ground in the Nation.

13. Started by sunrise roads tolerably good No provisions to be had for horse feed gives out in the middle of the wilderness at a loss to know what course to pursue mind much distres^d Our trust is yet in God whose mercy is over us and we yet think he will send us deliverance in some way Camp^d near a creek the bank very steep

14. Started by sunrise good roads made a good days drive lost our road. Camp^d nigh a creek where we got in the right way

15. Started early Camp^d on a bad hill horses got away had to walk 6 miles to look for them in the wilderness found them at an indian house. Much distres^d

16. Started late Bad roads Got no provisions for self or horses did not like the conduct of the Indians Camp^d nigh Walkers indian drunk came to M^r Harrises tent & plagued us all night horses get away & detain us—

17. Found Horses late indian tries to shoot us M^r Harris & family very kind and assist us Made a tolerable days drive & camp^d nigh the line not far from Ratclifts—got corn & fodder

18. Cros^d the line into the Alabama Territory¹ very glad on the occasion. M^r Harris's wagon breaks down Stop^d to assist him Camp^d nigh Leaths

19. Roads bad weather good Bolts Broke Smith's Lazy No meal to be had

20. Started Early got a little meal every thing very high people poor rough &c roads little Better Very unwell—

21. Started late roads good provisions high But more plenty nothing remarkable All well—

22. Rain^d all night Started late, mists, rain all day roads Bad Enter^d Joneses Vally² Good land corn & fodder high All well

23. Roads Bad fell in with hog drivers bought porke Camp^d at the Mill

24. Roads little Better corn high people Shuffling

25. Roads little Better Christmas day

26. Past Broken Roads & got to Tuscaloosa³ & feel thankful to kind Heaven that after 9 weeks traveling & expos^d to Every danger that we arriv^d safe and in good health

¹ Created by Act of Congress, Mar. 3, 1817,—in force Aug. 15, 1817, when the Constitution of Miss. was formed. *See* Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 61-63, for full abstract of governmental history.

² Named for "Devil" John Jones. He and three companions, Andrew McLaughlin, Moses and Isaac Fields, came from Tenn. in the spring of 1815, and made a small crop of corn that year near the present city of Bessemer, Jefferson County, Ala. In the fall they brought their families. Each succeeding year brought numbers of settlers, so that by 1818 the valley was quite populous.

³ Settled in 1815.



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